

U.S. Department of the Interior – Bureau of Reclamation

## **SAN LUIS DRAINAGE FEATURE RE-EVALUATION**

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### **Meeting Summary**

#### **Bay Area Elected Officials**

**November 6, 2002 – Concord, California**

#### **Alternatives Discussion**

### ***Meeting Participants***

Rhonda Gruska, Office of Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher  
Kathy Hoffman, Office of Congressman George Miller  
Jason Phillips, Reclamation  
Marian Echeverria, Reclamation  
Terry Cooke, URS  
Jennifer Allen, PAM

Reclamation is refining and narrowing alternatives for the San Luis Unit Drainage Feature Re-evaluation. Reclamation met with local elected official offices to discuss the alternatives focusing on the Delta disposal alternative. Participants received a project overview and a review of the alternatives.

### ***Meeting Purpose and Objectives***

- Provide an overview of the Feature Re-evaluation process
- Discuss drainwater source control and re-use
- Present alternatives focusing on the Delta disposal option
- Obtain input from participants

### ***Project Overview***

Jason Phillips reviewed the history of Reclamation's involvement with the San Luis Unit. He presented the key events since the San Luis Act (1960). Jason reviewed the court case under which Reclamation is doing this Feature Re-evaluation. He continued with a description of the drainage service area and the components of a complete drainage process. Participants provided the following questions and comments.

- Are the salts and selenium naturally occurring or are they added by the agricultural operations?  
*Soils within the project area naturally have high concentrations of salts and selenium. The drainwater comes from the shallow ground water level where naturally occurring salts and selenium are located. Imported irrigation water also contributes a portion of the salts. A drainage project would only involve this shallow groundwater.*
- Are the farms in the project area primarily family farm operations?  
*Farmers within the San Luis Unit are a mix of small family farms and larger corporate farms. The immediacy of this Re-evaluation comes from the fact that*

*some farmers are threatened to lose production on their property without drainage service.*

## **Alternatives**

Jason Phillips reviewed the approach to formulating and optimizing alternatives for the disposal concepts. Participants provided the following comments and suggestions regarding the Delta, Ocean, and In-Valley alternatives.

### **Delta Disposal Alternative**

- If drainwater is released into the Delta, how long would the dilution process take and what are the estimates for associated deaths in fish populations? Additionally, how would the tides interact with drainwater?

*Reclamation is currently using a model of the Delta system to determine how a Delta disposal alternative could impact those species living in the Delta. The model will also predict where the drainwater will go within the Delta and how the tides will influence this process.*

### **Ocean Disposal Alternative**

- How did the Regional Water Quality Control Board react to an ocean disposal alternative?

*Throughout the Re-evaluation, Reclamation has requested input from numerous state and federal agencies. The ~~Regional State~~ Water ~~Resources Quality~~ Control Board and California Coastal Commission have received briefings about the project. Agency representatives have provided the information about the process Reclamation would be subject to for an ocean disposal project approval.*

*Reclamation provided a briefing for San Luis Obispo County representatives and elected officials in August 2002. The local group voiced strong opposition to an ocean disposal project.*

### **In-Valley Alternative**

- What amount of salt would be left over from evaporation ponds? Additionally, what possibilities exist for reuse and/or disposal?

*Reclamation is using modeling studies to predict the amount of salt evaporation ponds would produce. Current plans do not include a disposal plan for the salt. The salt would settle in place in the ponds. If opportunities for reuse or marketing of the salts were to arise, Reclamation would explore those options.*

- What happens after the 50-year project period?

*Reclamation determined a 50-year investment period. The assumption is that operations would continue beyond that time period.*

## **Land Retirement**

Participants provided the following comments and suggestions regarding land retirement.

- In a land retirement project, who would own and manage the property? What would happen to the water rights associated with the property?

*Reclamation is currently working with the Bureau of Land Management to explore options for maintenance of retired lands. Reclamation is also researching the possibility of restoration and pilot projects on retired acres.*

*The issue of water rights is a key interest within land retirement projects. Reclamation will determine these details. Currently, Reclamation is studying the impact land retirement could have on drainage need.*

- What is the cost of land retirement in comparison to the cost of the various alternatives?

*Reclamation will include a cost analysis in the Preliminary Preferred Drainage Service Plan. Currently, the costs for the In-Valley alternative and land retirement are close. The ocean and Delta disposal alternatives costs are much higher.*

### ***Other Comments and Suggestions***

Participants provided the following additional comments about the project process.

- What are the details of the potential settlement between Reclamation and Westlands Water District?

*Reclamation is involved in a series of meetings and negotiations to work out details towards a settlement.*

- Would the settlement Reclamation is currently discussing solve the drainage problems?

*The settlement would involve the retirement of only a portion of the drainage impaired land. Reclamation would still be responsible for the court order to provide drainage. A settlement would settle the Sumner Peck litigation.*

- Participants encouraged Reclamation to continue outreach efforts to stakeholders.

### ***Schedule***

Jason Phillips reviewed the anticipated milestones for 2002 and beyond.

- Preliminary Preferred Drainage Service Plan – December 2002
- Initiate EIS – January 2003
- Interim Actions